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Handbook for providing rural Tourism services to Japanese tourists

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CAITO project
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HANDBOOK FOR PROVIDING RURAL TOURISM SERVICES TO JAPANESE TOURISTS

PREFACE

“Japan is a good pilot market to win the whole of Asia. Welcome to Japan, it’s a worthwhile challenge”.

Mr. Shigeyoshi Noto, marketing expert, Japan

This handbook aims to increase the capability of rural tourism companies to enter the Japanese tourism market and includes knowledge gathered from surveys of Japanese visitors, tourism agencies and travel intermediaries and analysis of Japanese tourists’ expectations and interests compared with the products and services offered by rural tourism enterprises. Following customer journey decision-makers’ interviews and forums, transport gaps were identified and potential solutions proposed. There is also the possibility to replace sectorial thinking with holistic or system thinking and actions, which could be seen as the basis for innovations.

Building bridges between Baltic rural tourism providers and Japanese high-level final customers is a challenging prospect because of long distances, cultural differences, language barriers and a very rapidly changing market. At same time this is an important market because of the big volume and Japanese customers’ interest and respect towards our culture, nature, and heritage.

This handbook is composed based on the knowledge and experience gathered during the INTERREG Central Baltic programme project “Meta-cluster for attracting the Japanese tourism market”. Our project partnership hopes that you will find this a helpful and interesting read which motivates you to provide more and better-quality products suited to the Japanese tourism market and to raise the accessibility of rural areas for other markets as well.



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Chapter 1. The potential of rural tourism in Finland, Estonia and Latvia

In recent decades, rural tourism has shown an increasing trend across Europe. Rural tourists value nature, landscape and the aurora borealis and they might also be modern humanists (experienced tourists) seeking experiences in exotic and unspoilt nature (forests, sauna, snow, walking on the ice) with local people. In this context, Asian tourism has for some time, been seen as a new potential growth market for Finland and the Baltic States, and several national and regional tourism strategies count on this market. Initially, Asian visitors generally focused on the main tourist attractions and capital cities in the area, but new products have attracted an increased interest in this market, in line with worldwide trends in health, wellness and the natural environment. This creates new opportunities, especially for rural tourism, but is not without its challenges. Rural tourism provision must meet Asian customers' needs and demands, which sometimes may prove problematic for existing products. Therefore, to fully exploit this potential new market, companies often need to undertake development activities, which in turn, assumes that businesses have knowledge of the behaviour of Asian tourists. This handbook has been specially prepared to provide a small part of this information by collecting the existing literature and surveys made on Japanese tourists and their travel behaviour in Finland, Estonia and Latvia.

In choosing a travel destination, instead of materialism, the Japanese are turning their interest to experiences, including in rural areas and nature. Wellness, relaxation, silence and peace are important to Japanese people but they are also difficult to commercialise. Origin and naturalness or health and sustainability are a recent trend: this includes local and organic food, local people and culture. Rural destinations could exploit this trend. Security is another recent trend that is very well suited to rural tourism and Finland, Estonia and Latvia have the image of a safe destination. Finland is characterised by design, culture, unspoilt

HIGHLIGHTS

- New tourism products such as health, wellness and the natural environment tourism have become popular among Asian tourists, which creates new opportunities for rural tourism service providers.
- Japanese tourists very much appreciate unspoilt nature, relaxing and peaceful rest, which at the same time is safe for them in all aspects.
- Rural tourism in Finland, Estonia and Latvia has a close association with naturalness, health and sustainability, which includes local (organic) food, local people and culture. These countries also have an image of safe and culturally original destinations.
- Rural tourism enterprises need to revise their product offers and marketing communication to ensure better compliance of their services with Japanese tourist expectations.

nature and the aurora borealis. Estonia is characterised by culture (e.g. Tallinn's Old Town) and nature. Latvia is characterised by culture (e.g. Riga). The average time spent in Finland, Estonia or Latvia is short and if tourists are travelling to rural areas, this takes time. Therefore, it is expected that rural tourists are time rich, a group which mostly consists of women or elderly people who have more time. Distances are another challenge for rural areas. In Finland particularly, distances are long and in all three countries public transportation in rural areas is poor: group travellers need buses, and independent travellers may have to rent a car (typically especially in Estonia). The lack of web and Facebook pages and marketing material in Japanese is a problem which reduces the visibility and awareness of rural tourism enterprises and travel packages. Rural destinations are not the main target areas in the programmes of Visit Finland, for example. Finnish Lakeland, archipelago and coastal areas are attracting less than 10% of Japanese tourists and they have a weak profile. Good contacts (travel agents etc.) and specific marketing actions (bloggers, travel guides, core target groups) can improve this situation. The lack of skills among entrepreneurs and workers is also a problem. In rural areas, tourism enterprises are small and seasonal and therefore have difficulties in providing services for group travellers. Additionally, many rural tourism enterprises are run by part-time or lifestyle entrepreneurs who have less interest in increasing their business or serving special tourist groups such as the Japanese. Part-time and seasonal jobs do not attract a committed and skilled work force.

In further chapters, the content of this handbook is prepared so as to provide the existing knowledge in a summarised form to help SMEs in their rural tourism product development.

Chapter 2. Japan as a target market for rural tourism service providers

In 2018, approximately 19 million Japanese travelled abroad, equivalent to about 15 % of the population of Japan. Since 94 % of these travellers came from major cities like Tokyo, Osaka, Nagoya and Kyoto, it is reasonable to say that on the whole Japanese tourists are urban city dwellers. The most popular destinations among Japanese are Southeast Asia, East Asia, Hawaii and U.S. Mainland and Europe. Approximately 15-17% of Japanese tourists choose Europe as their main destination and Japan ranks as Europe's third largest source of visitors after the United States and China.

Culture naturally impacts on tourists' travel habits and this is also the case with the Japanese. Travelling abroad was restricted in Japan until 1964, however following removal of restrictions, this was even promoted by the Japanese government in the 1980s in order to change the balance of Japan's business with the rest of the world and promote mutual understanding. The government and the travel industry conducted several campaigns to encourage people to take holidays and travel abroad, promoted overseas school tours and assisted public relations for foreign tourist organisations. Incentives that eased visa and other travel restrictions and procedures were also launched. The same development continued during the 1990s and despite the economic depression, outbound tourism has been growing steadily since and been relatively stable during the last decade. Tourism is by far the most important purpose for foreign travel (over 70% of all travel) for Japanese. Thus, in comparison with many other Asian markets, Japan is already a relatively mature tourism market.

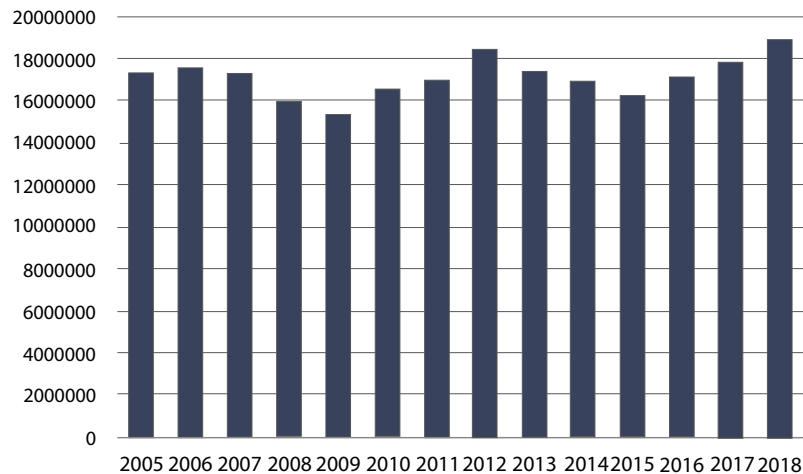
The most popular months to travel abroad are March, August and September, which reflect the main holiday seasons in Japan. Holidays are typically relatively short, averaging around 5-6 days (Noto, S., 2017). Even

HIGHLIGHTS

- Manage the customers' expectations – make sure to provide detailed information to your customers beforehand.
- Japanese tourists appreciate punctuality and politeness! Be sure that the services take place as promised and the service is polite!
- Pay especial attention to cleanliness.
- Authentic experiences (not just sightseeing) are greatly appreciated.
- The opportunity to eat and taste local food is also greatly appreciated!
- Make sure the style of your web-pages or advertising matches Japanese criteria.
- Tour operators sometimes organise trips for groups. Therefore, they also set requirements for your services. Make sure you meet them.

though Japan is a collective culture, their personal interests and free time hobbies are becoming more personalised and individualistic and these impact on their travelling habits.

When travelling abroad, Japanese, in general, look for beautiful natural environments, rich history and heritage, good food and wine, especially focusing on local cuisine and products, while price also matters. Nevertheless, the most important factor influencing the choice of destination is safety and the image of a secure destination. Japanese are very safety conscious tourists and, for example, the terrorist attacks in Belgium (2016) and France (2015), almost immediately reduced Japanese travelling to these destinations by 60 - 70%.



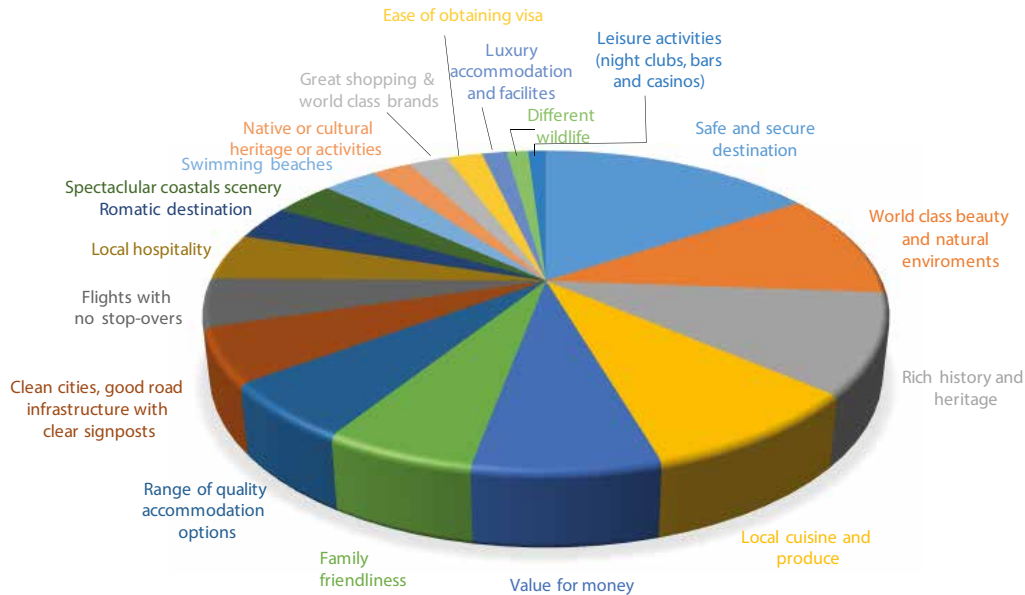
The number of Japanese travelling abroad

Source : Ministry of Justice Japan "Statistics on Immigration Control"

As tourists, Japanese value having as much detailed information as possible before their travel, preferably in Japanese language. Some tourists, especially the elderly still have language problems and thus marketing material in Japanese can be considered as a competitive advantage. Also, the presence of a guide is important to facilitate a fuller experience for example in relation to an activity programme.

During recent decades, the popularity of beach-resort holidays has decreased while city breaks and touring holidays have increased among the Japanese. They are looking for more and more experiences and activities that allow them to ‘touch’ the life of a destination country. Japanese are also often seasoned travellers and there has, in recent years, been a strong shift from sightseeing tourism to experience-based tourism. Equally, in recent years there has been a visible shift from group travelling to individual travelling. Traditionally Japanese tourists have also been known as “city hoppers”, trying to visit as many different places as possible during their stay. However, the number of single destination holidays has now started to grow slowly.

The global megatrends impacting the tourism industry also impact on Japanese tourism markets. Modern humanists, a new growing target group worldwide, are also visible in Japanese markets. These are tourists that have travelled a lot, have high income, appreciate experiences, responsibility and self-development. For example, origin and naturalness are increasingly valued especially among the young Japanese women who travel. They prefer local products over luxury



The most important factors in choosing the travel destination for Japanese tourists
Source: *Tourism Development International (2014)*

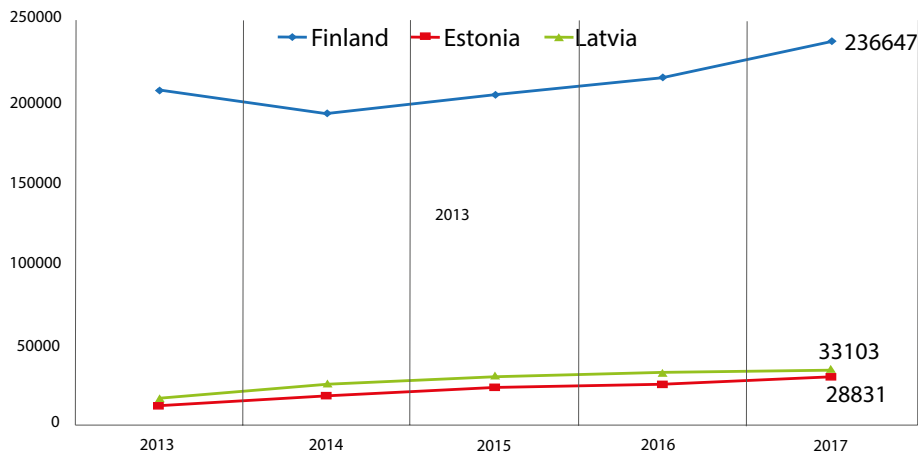
brands and appreciate products that are handmade from natural ingredients (especially health products and cosmetics). It has been suggested that the next future global trends impacting Japanese travelling habits will be: the increasing value of ethical living, middle class retreat (meaning the growing individualism in product requirements) and the increasing proportion of one-person Japanese households (approximately half of all households now consist of single persons).

The trends mentioned above are especially interesting from a rural tourism point of view since rural tourism products often include elements that seem to be specifically interesting for Japanese tourists. Rural tourism is however, still relatively unknown by Japanese tourists. There is still a lack of knowledge of potential products, and a lack of easily accessible products and major challenges for rural tourism are location and transportation. Japanese tourists, coming from major cities where public transportation is very flexible, are not likely to rent a car during their trip and as the holidays are relatively short, travel to the rural location should not be too time consuming.

Japanese travel trends in Finland and Baltics

Japanese tourist arrivals to Finland, Estonia and Latvia are growing although the scale of arrivals is different. In Finland, there are approximately 210,000 - 230 000 overnights annually, whilst in Estonia and Latvia the number is about one tenth of this. Nevertheless, the general trend in all countries is increasing (see below). Not least due to the 41 weekly direct flights between Helsinki and major Japanese cities (in April 2019).

These three countries form a nice three-country package for Japanese visitors, where typically, the visits focus on capital cities however increasingly Finnish rural areas (Lapland, Finnish Lakeland, archipelago) are getting more attention. Surveys have shown that almost 65% of Japanese visitors expressed an interest in rural areas (CAITO, 2017; Matilainen & Santalahti, 2018) where the attractions often relate to nature and local culture. This suggests that excellent opportunities exist for rural tourism product development (see below).



The overnights of Japanese tourists in Finland, Estonia and Latvia
Source: Noto, S. 2018

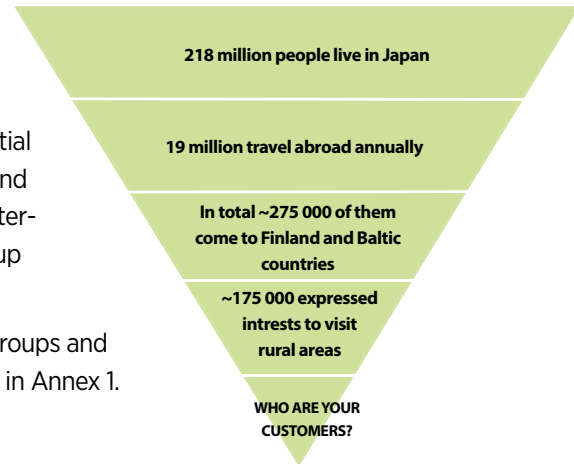
The reasons Japanese tourists mention for visiting Finland, Estonia and Latvia
Source: Shibasaki, Y., 2018

FINLAND	ESTONIA	LATVIA
Experiencing the aurora borealis	Novel destination	Usually visited on a package tour with Estonia and Lithuania. Rarely mentioned as a main destination.
Unique natural environment	Often part of a tour in the Baltic countries or part of a trip to Finland	Riga Old Town.
General tranquillity	Easy to make a day trip to Tallinn from Helsinki	Rundāle palace near Bauska
Cultural sights (e.g. Helsinki Lutheran Cathedral and Suomenlinna Sea Fortress)	Tallinn medieval Old Town	Turaida castle in Sigulda
Finnish design	Handmade souvenirs	
	Getting around is easier as everything is close by	

Customer segments

With respect to rural tourism, three potential target groups have been defined for Finland and Baltic countries. These are women, inter-generational groups and families and group travellers.

More on the preferences of these target groups and Japanese tourists in general can be found in Annex 1.



WOMEN UNDER 50 YEARS

- Single, can also be living with their parents
- High income and education
- Typically travel with friends
- More active, but also price-sensitive consumers who follow rapidly changing trends
- Considered as trendsetters in Japanese tourism
- Accustomed to traveling independently, capable, e.g. able to use public transport, have a strong identity as a traveller
- Typically, have at least some language skills (English)
- Can stay longer (up to six or seven nights), especially if the accommodation is unique
- Prefer flexible schedules
- Want to integrate into local life and local culture
- Can also be reached through online marketing and booking systems



INTERGENERATIONAL GROUPS AND FAMILIES

- Include e.g. mothers and adult daughters; grandparents with grandchildren, groups of three generations, young families, couples without children
- Families prefer nature, wellbeing, famous characters like Moomin or Santa Claus
- Emphasize good accommodation
- Young couples: especially interested in Nordic countries and typically visited Finland previously
- Interested in different kinds of experiences, natural phenomena, special/historic sites, aesthetics
- Important to be able to share images of their trip through social media
- Typically, have at least some language skills (English)
- Can also be reached through online marketing and booking systems



GROUP TRAVELLERS

- Typically, elderly, usually retired couples or widows
- Leisure time and wealth to travel frequently
- Interested in natural attractions
- Appreciate safety, routines, guides and group travel
- 1-2 days of rural experiences might suit this target group
- Language is a problem, Japanese speaking guide is preferred
- Usually buy their trip through a Japanese travel agency



Chapter 3. Marketing of rural tourism products to Japanese customers

Latest trends in customer needs and creation of appropriate rural tourism products

Nowadays, the importance of healthy and sustainable consumption is growing. Indeed, active rural tourism enterprises have many opportunities to attract sophisticated customers as this trend, among other issues, particularly focuses on animal welfare, promotion of organic products and enhancing of local businesses' green competitiveness.

According to Kotler et.al. (2016), marketing aims and tasks have significantly changed during the last 50 years (see below). Namely, today, customers inspired by new wave technologies are looking for such products that can make the world a better place, which requires not only functional, but also emotional and spiritual value propositions. Changes in lifestyle also play an important role – there is an increasing trend for spending more time in the fresh air, tasting eco products and participating in local traditions, which are available in rural areas outside cities. Moreover, the number of sophisticated rural tourism travellers is also increasing due to growing concerns of geopolitical instability in other popular European tourism destinations, and who are now turning their attention away from cities.

Not all rural tourism enterprises are aware whether their marketing strategy is compliant with Japanese customers' specifics nor of the need to more precisely adapt their product positioning and marketing strategies to the value system of Japanese tourists. In their daily rush, rural tourism enterprises pay little attention to target-oriented marketing activities rather they rely on word-of-

MARKETING 1.0 vs MARKETING 2.0 vs MARKETING 3.0

	MARKETING 1.0 Product-centric Marketing	MARKETING 2.0 Customer-oriented Marketing	MARKETING 3.0 Value-driven Marketing
Objective	Sell products	Satisfy and retain the consumers	Make the world a better place
Enabling Forces	Industrial Revolution	Information Technology	New Wave Technology
How companies see the market	Mass Buyers with Physical Needs	Smarter Consumer with Mind and Heart	Whole Human with Mind, Heart and Spirit
Key marketing concept	Product development	Differentiation	Values
Company marketing guidelines	Product specification	Corporate and Product Positioning	Corporate, Vision, Values
Value propositions	Functional	Functional and Emotional	Functional, Emotional and Spiritual
Interaction with	One-to-Many	One-to-One	Many-to-Many

The evolution of marketing aims and tasks

Source: Kotler et. al., 2016

mouth marketing and personal selling, which in the age of the digital economy, however, are becoming less effective.

Creation of appropriate rural tourism products for Japanese tourists

Tourism marketing differs from conventional service marketing because the customer purchases a series of services. In service marketing, it is necessary to integrate the 8 elements of the marketing mix: product, price, place, promotion, people, physical evidence and process.

Pricing policies are usually very individual matters, but tourism products as sets of several joint services (place as accommodation and environment, promotion as communication with potential customers; physical evidence as security validation, and process as overall organization of activities during the visit) should be appropriately “packaged” for individual and/or group Japanese travellers.

■ PRODUCT AND PROCESS

Tourism is a service sold to customers, the tourist experience is the product and as such is largely intangible. The quality of the tourist experience as a product is directly proportional to the quality of the service a tourism business provides. Thus, the product must be designed to highlight its features and to satisfy the tourist's needs. If the product is branded, the customers, especially Japanese tourists, find it more reliable.

The majority of Japanese tourists visiting the countryside of Finland, Estonia and Latvia are already experienced travellers, are usually aware of their needs and enjoy the nature and local cultural traditions, "hobby holiday" is also attractive for them, thus practical workshops are highly recommended. Moreover, the "enjoy yourself" principle will not work since Japanese tourists would rather prefer to eat and spend time with their host's family.

The Japanese appreciate punctuality and precision, thus there should be detailed information about the activities planned during each day. Moreover, activities for Japanese visitors should be given more time compared with Europeans, and since there is usually very little time, the day must be strategically planned and well organised. However, it is not recommended to have more than three activities in a day, ideally by combining several attractions (workshop activities + countryside, nature + city) and those included in the entertainment programme should not be too complicated. Time for taking photos is an important part of the trip everywhere.

Finnish, Estonian and Latvian hospitality with large portion sizes can confuse shy Japanese tourists as they normally eat smaller portions. Accordingly, there should be an opportunity for everybody to individually choose their preferred size of portion.

■ PLACE AND PHYSICAL EVIDENCE

The place is where the tourists visit and stay. The potential of a tourist destination lies in its attractiveness or aesthetic value, accessibility, and the facilities it provides for tourists. Tourists also seek out places for the activities they offer, the amenities and skilled workforce they provide, and its location.

What Japanese tourists expect from their trip is safety, security and high quality of accommodation with Wi-Fi. For Japanese tourists, it would also be advisable to prepare information on using the nearest public transport (even if this is very complicated). Regarding security aspects, it is also recommended to display in a visible place certificates, acknowledgments etc. that give evidence that the product is safe. A map of the neighbourhood should also be available in case somebody gets lost; a telephone number where to call in case of emergency as well as an evacuation plan for such situations.

■ PROMOTION

Promotion is intended to inform customers about the products, create an image of the product, and position the products in the market. There are various direct and indirect ways of promoting tourism products to Japanese travellers.

■ PEOPLE

After travelling, of all the impressions gained, “people” is the aspect that usually remains in the memory of a traveller for a long time. Japanese tourists greatly appreciate if the staff/owner of a rural tourism enterprise would spend some time together with them (during the meals, practical workshops where they can make souvenirs or cook together). Japanese tourists also very much value guides who can speak good English and when interacting with Japanese, courtesy and unobtrusiveness is recommended.

Important aspects for digital marketing in creation rural tourism products

Digital marketing and internet marketing are the same thing in relation to taking concrete actions; digital marketing relates to digital activities while marketing and sales relates to media. Digital marketing includes (see below) a company's homepage, visitor tracking, e-mail marketing, social media channels, electronic customer service, online marketing, search engine marketing, digital sales tools, intra- and extranet solutions and mobile services (TEM 2015,9).



Digital marketing context (Pixabay. CCO Creative Commons licence)

Observations made during the CAITO project identified several issues and challenges in digital marketing amongst service providers and includes issues such as visibility, viability, lack of time, segmentation/knowledge of the target audience, interesting content, good branding and image, financial resources, customer satisfaction, mobile devices, standing out from competitors, targeting is not based on buying behaviour and online behaviour, social media activity, poor returns of marketing investment, growth, e-commerce, measuring and additional sales. Because of these challenges rural tourism SMEs need to consider the bigger picture of their business. What is their overall strategy and channel strategy in their online customer service, what are their aims and objectives and where to have and cover resources. In practice this means thinking to whom, where and what.

Online customer service is not only a digital marketing strategy, a channel strategy or producing/serving an individual operation but it is thinking about operation mode and digitalization effects on company's operations at many levels. These levels are such as communication, brand, staff development, IT-choices, sales and customer relationships and also electronic solutions such as: product implementation, service and production aid. Online customer service

provides an interactive service channel and a way to develop customer relationships and it requires human resources and customer service attitude. Web channels should be considered as personal service channels where you discuss with customers, receive and give feedback and recommendations, thank customers and guide them forward.

Marketing strategy is one of the company's most important strategies. It consists of main market and research information, and image and behavioural research. In marketing and digital strategies the questions and answers are:

■ Who?

- ☐ target group, segmentation, targeting

■ What?

- ☐ objectives among the group target

■ How?

- ☐ how to succeed in the market, positioning

This combination and vision gives a strategic scheme which should and can be summarised in one sentence by a company.

Brands consist of: images that potential customers connect with the brand, reputation of the images which customers have about the brand, and identity images that the company has about the brand. To create and maintain their brand, service providers/companies have to take care of core communication by repeatedly answering: What? Whom? How? Repeating themselves again and again so that all persons connected with their business and digital marketing are clear. What is the company's positioning? Are the concept and message clear to the selected target customer group? Sum up again: the slogan of the service in just one sentence! How has the message/service been visualised? If they are not visual – do it right now; and if visualisation has been done, is it clear enough so that: 1) no one will misunderstand it and 2) they will be convinced to buy your services because of it.

Online marketing plan

An online marketing plan involves four dimensions (see below) which are operational environment related issues, goals, measuring and monitoring.

When thinking of online business, the online marketing plan should be the first step in that path. Service business's aims and objectives and its environment like customers and competitors have to be observed carefully because they are defining boundaries for online marketing. Measures and monitoring come after observing as these determine future improvements and development. These also provide information on both a company's current state and its situation online. When clarifying a company's current state you should answer how the company is perceived/seen? Useful tools for answering this include web services such as Tagboard.com, Socialmention.com and Google Alerts. To find out how your company compares to competitors, you can use the web service www.webrankstats.com/compare-stats. Besides these it is also important to consider how the business has succeeded in its operations until now. What is the starting point? And what is the main conversation topic right now?



Online marketing plan

When taking forward the online marketing plan the next step is to think: who takes care of the company's online marketing, whether everything should be done by staff in this field, whether there is sufficient "know-how" in the company, which channels should be used in online marketing to achieve the company's target customer numbers, whether language options are required and how interesting content of the service will be created.

In terms of sales channels, consider the following: whether to have your company's own online store or be hosted elsewhere, which payment methods are to be used, which legislation needs to be observed and if there are any restrictions.

After having revised and assessed the marketing resources, it is important to focus on customers: define aims and objectives as well as resources and revise/reconfirm who the company's customers are and what channels they use. Key data in this context are: how the customers work, which devices they use, what information they seek, what the most important keywords defining the company's service are, how the customers end up on the company website.

The customer basically consumes the service at least 3 times: *Before the travel* – *at the destination* – *after the travel*. A consumer barometer is a useful tool when observing these issues www.consumerbarometer.com. Other tools e.g. automated inquiries, interviews and Google Analytics can also be used. After

completing all these steps the next question is: how can a customer book a service or contact the company and if the company prefers to have paid or organic visibility online.

Setting the goals may have many different dimensions. What is the most important target/goal for the company? Sales and orders? Marketing visibility? Launch, maintenance, growth? Commitment? Or something else? When defining the targets and goals, aims and objectives for the company's online marketing plan, the following details and issues would have to be observed:

1. measuring (what is the current state, what is the measured change and aim)
2. quantitative aims (concrete, clear), the number of likes, number of visitors, number of commentators and comments, number of followers, sales, bookings, offers and inquiries
3. qualitative aims include image, reputation, evaluations and estimates and contents.

Actions which have to be thought through in online marketing are: who produces the content, which are the company's channel choices and why, who builds layout and functionality for the chosen channels, who ensures the availability and accessibility of the service, and how updates and responsibilities are shared among the staff.

Monitoring how a company's actions improve business in the online sector gives an idea what to do next. In order to decide how to monitor online business the company should define which elements (see below) are most important.

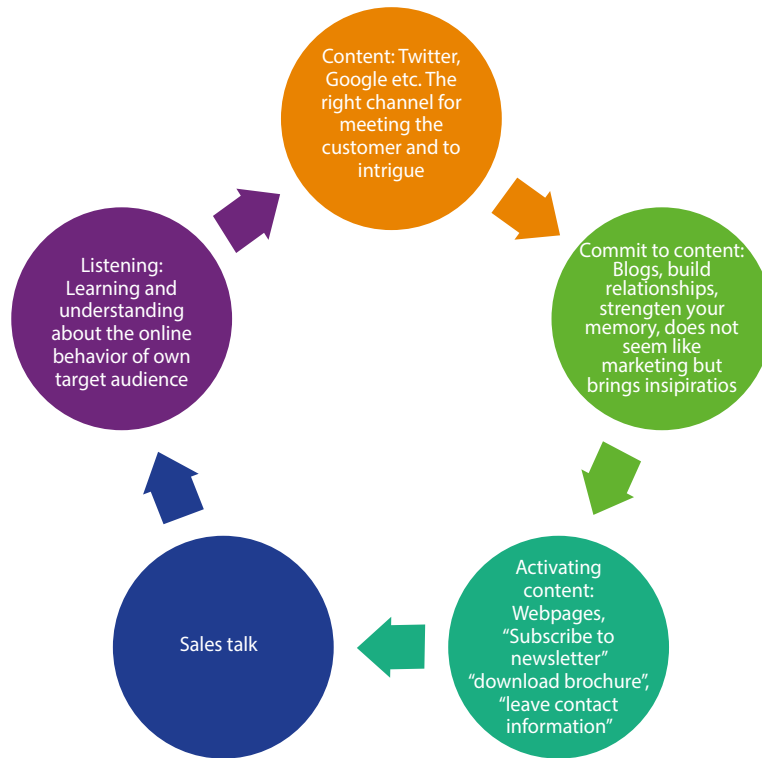
When defining channel and digital marketing communication strategy or other digital ecosystems, careful consideration is needed for the following questions:

Likes and clicks	Share, at once	Examining the pages	Customers input bus	Customer profile	New and returning customers
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Directional general idea of the amount 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Customers interest and commitment 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> How succesfull the created content is 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Do the channel choces guide the customers as intented 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Was the target audience reached 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Did the marketing attact interest

Elements for monitoring digital marketing

Which channels are chosen? What is done in the channels? Who to pursue and why? What is the channel's function for the customer?

After having determining definitions for your digital marketing strategy, the content and its path have to considered and thought through (see below). Keronen and Tanni have defined what to observe and consider when the content path is defined in the following figure.



Content path by Keronen and Tanni 2013, 40–46

It should be remembered that maintaining several channels is challenging and different content management systems are available for managing multiple types of content. It is important to remember that all the channels should produce unique content, mechanical copying of the same text and image won't work properly.

Useful forms for planning your marketing can be found from annex 2.

Chapter 4. Defining problems, listing of gaps in the customer journey in Finland, Estonia, Latvia

While large companies have the resources to regularly monitor their manufacturing processes against systemic mistakes to assure the quality of their products, small and medium-sized enterprises (SME) in the tourism industry have fewer resources and often do not think so carefully about systemic errors because the outcome of this assessment is not easily visible. At the same time however, these tourism SMEs are interdependent and together form the country tourism industry which has a considerable size. Systemic errors in this industry can and do have considerable negative supply side impact. To try and ensure that this will not happen with the Japanese tourism market, we further discuss possible issues in the customer's supply chain.

Products are often not suited to the customer's needs and expectations. Each product is special and thus all entrepreneurs should think which improvements they could specifically make but there are also some general recommendations.

Communications

Communication is especially important for Japanese tourists as they are interested in the local lifestyle and all background information. At the same time, there are limits and obstacles because of cultural differences, language barriers from both sides, lifestyle, customs, etc. To assist you overcome some of these obstacles, the following recommendations might be helpful:

- Translate your company website into Japanese, this not only shows that you are prepared to welcome the Japanese guests but also makes custo-

mers better aware of your products and services. This should take only a few days.

- Translate one A4 page of the most important local information for giving to your customers on arrival e.g. additional services, safety instructions, nearest public services, and attractions, how to use communication software, important phone numbers, etc.
- Learn some welcoming words and customs in Japanese and use the dictionary.
- Be prepared to spend a greater amount of time with your customers for providing them with background information and explaining how everything is arranged. Sometimes problems might arise from misunderstanding each other in minor detail.
- Become familiar with Japanese history in general and main cultural differences.

Quality of products and services

Very important for Japanese customers is the authenticity of the products and services, brands, stories and labels (e.g. UNESCO World Heritage Listing) and a harmonic atmosphere which also includes communication. The CAITO marketing expert in Japan explained: “When communication is good then the lower quality of some products and services would not harm the whole experience of the trip”. The rather lower quality of rural accommodation is acceptable if the host explains for example that the idea of their offer is the experience of how local people lived 200 years ago. After these clarifications, the dry toilet and basic washing facilities would normally be welcomed as experiencing something special but only for 1-2 nights per trip.

Usually, rural tourism products, especially nature tours are promoted for a group size starting from 15 persons. However, this is not suitable for individuals or small family groups. There are two options on how to address this issue:

1. If the minimum group size is set by the provider for economic reasons only, then a new pricing policy should be considered, e.g. the minimum price for the tour package should cover the product net value + small

profit and each additional group member would increase the profit or lower the price for customers

2. Another solution could be to arrange the expected group size by yourself when the activity requires a certain number of participants, e.g. paintball and other group games and sports in nature, team building exercises such as big boat canoeing or team skiing with one pair of skis, festivities or events where masses of tourists are expected. In these cases, the tourism provider promotes a certain time and place where the group should gather together and then random individuals will form the group size needed. Usually, visitors are asked to pre-register and the transportation would be arranged by the provider.

A further issue is that local tourism activities and events should be better promoted and visible to customers. Local tourism destination management organisations could step in here.

Food

Baltic country cuisine is highly valued by Japanese customers and during familiarisation trips, they recommended that we should more effectively promote gourmet tourism. Nicely served dishes become extremely important as food blogging is still trending and photos of food service are almost always included in tour package descriptions.

Frequent feedback from Japanese customers is that portion sizes are too large and while the common reply is: “you could leave it on the plate”, this runs against Japanese eating habits.

Recommendation: to provide smaller portions and a more diversified selection or serve breakfast and lunch as a buffet table. Note that sometimes when the booking is done via a travel agent they might expect separately served portions for each person to ensure that each customer would have a whole meal.

The high hygienic requirements of Japanese customers are widely known, for example, handwashing before taking food is a must, and at least wet napkins should be provided.

Supply chain

Rural tourism products are difficult to sell to overseas customers because of the small volume, the products are not standardised and there are issues with communication, accessibility and unreliability, etc. Thus, big travel agencies are not interested in working with you, nevertheless rural, nature and eco-tourism and “live like locals” provisions give uniqueness to the whole tourism destination and packages.

The Japanese tourism market is seen by experts as mature which means that they are also pioneers of new trends. One of these trends is that alongside selling tours to our countries via Japanese and local travel agencies the fully independent travellers (FIT) group is growing rapidly. Unfortunately, not all tourism providers are ready to be oriented to direct marketing. Recommendations: try to create direct contacts with customers using the support of tourism boards, embassies, media, visitors and residents from Japan; promote your products focusing on certain target groups; describe your products in as much detail as this would be done by a tour operator, ensure booking information and channels.

Transport, travel information, ticketing

Routes to rural destinations for Japanese independent tourists in south-west Finland – Estonia – Latvia were pilot tested using “volunteer travellers” within the CAITO project. The main goal of the pilots was to identify gaps and difficulties in the route or customer journey. Volunteers were tasked with identifying rural destinations suited to single or multiple day trips and then planning the route to reach these destinations using only public transport. To make the testing as realistic as possible in terms of how Japanese independent travellers would find the

HIGHLIGHTS

- Check your products against systemic mistakes.
- Tourism products should be better suited to customers’ needs and expectations.
- Better communication before and during the visit.
- Brands, stories and labels are important.
- Authenticity and harmonic atmosphere.
- For activity tourism the minimum group size requirement is an issue.
- Smaller portions or buffet table.
- Hygienic facilities.
- Direct marketing to respond to Japanese travel trends.
- Better product description including local provision.

trips, volunteers were required to only use the English language. This included: when making all the necessary booking and reservation arrangements for their itinerary; when navigating their itinerary in terms of signage, local transfer information and timetabling; and when communicating with the personnel of travel service providers.

The following is a summary of the findings of these test journeys and industry interviews.

The creation of good connections between transport services (including inter-modal) which are easy to use is very important for the developers of tourism products and tourism packages and the agents selling these products/packages. Although the effectiveness of the integration between different modes of transport works OK in cities, there are problems in rural areas where it can be difficult to transfer between bus services and modes. A single travel ticket across all areas in a country would also be very helpful for rural tourism travellers but there is also a need for more frequent public transport services.

Travel information needed for the customer journey is often difficult to find in rural areas, there is little information in stations and bus stops that are out of towns and when it is provided, it is mostly only in the national language. The best way of providing information is online, while much information can be found on Google Maps this needs a good internet connection (mobile data is expensive for non-EU phone contracts) and is not always up to date. The information is widespread but without knowing what “peatus.ee”, “tpilet.ee”, “matkahuolto” or “vr” or other services are, it could be extremely difficult to plan a trip.

Problems often start with intermodal transportation where ticket purchase options, particularly for local public transportation systems, are unclear. In most cases, it is impossible to purchase tickets for rural bus services via the internet but it does depend on each provider. In many cases, however, it is not possible to buy tickets or find accurate information on travel services more than 10 days in advance of the journey. Tickets can also be bought on board if there are vacant seats, however many foreign visitors wish to plan their full journey to be sure of arrival at their destination safely. Being unable to buy the final part of this journey might deter visitors from travelling to our rural areas.

In Latvia one major issue is that according to the Latvian Language Law (Article 21, State Language Law), all information intended for the public provided by state and municipal institutions must be only in the Latvian language, except in certain circumstances (e.g. international transport hubs).

Pilot and respondent groups stated that creating itineraries in rural areas based on public transport was difficult even for local people, the reason being that most rural bus networks are created exclusively for local people for their everyday use. In Estonia, local bus itineraries operate/are planned within the limits of each county and as soon as you cross the border into another, it is a completely different system. The potential development of demand-led transportation services (On-Demand Bus Services/ “dial-a-bus”) in remoter rural areas may also lead to reduced timetabled transport services to these destinations. Thus, visitors may be completely reliant on the help of the final destination host on planning the itinerary.

The ease for non-native speaking visitors to identify where to get off their bus in rural areas was found to be poor, for a number of reasons: in rural areas people (and bus drivers) seldom speak a foreign language, many rural services do not have on-board route announcements and rural bus stop name signs are difficult to see from the bus or are not provided.

Tourist information (in foreign languages) in rural areas is poor or almost non-existent but there is scope for more signs in English about rural sight-seeing spots (such as old churches, beautiful waterfalls) on main roads. There are many such valuable places, but they are hard for foreigners to find. The situation is slowly improving, but progress depends on both local municipality and government funding and resources. No money means no signs! The provision of rural tourism services and information in foreign language is similarly poor, for example public WCs, although most towns do have tourist information centres/offices.

For those travelling by car it can be difficult to understand where parking is allowed in rural areas, in many it is free of charge but this is not announced. Paying for parking is very problematic for tourists as many parking lots take payments only with a mobile phone. From parkimine.ee in Estonia you can find out where you can also pay in cash but if you arrive unprepared you face difficulties as you need to know the name of the car park you want to go to.

Summary of results of customer journey pilot testing

Criteria for selection included being located in the beautiful countryside, proximity to activities which might interest Japanese tourists, quality of the accommodation (bathroom, cleanliness and breakfast). Planning also involved the ease with which the accommodation could be reached by public transport. This latter task proved to be quite difficult since logistical information was not often provided, thus a number of websites had to be used to correlate the above criteria and a number of very attractive venues were excluded due to the difficulties created by the lack of public transport options and/or travel information.

The final trip itineraries and time schedules in general worked quite well and only required a small number of adjustments, suggesting that timetables mostly worked according to the advertised schedules. However, unforeseen changes in transport service provision (e.g. timetables) resulted in some problems, these were frequently due to the lack of supplementary information provided in the English language.

Generally, while no really serious problems in moving from one place to another were found, having online real-time access to Google Maps was really essential for some parts of the journeys. As highlighted in our other customer journey research, however, mobile phone access to internet sites can be difficult and expensive in terms of data download costs for visitors (e.g. Japanese clients) where they are using non-EU country, mobile roaming contracts.

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Annex 1. The checklists

compiled by University of Helsinki, Ruralia Institute

The aim of these checklists is to help you to evaluate your own product and how it fits with the expectations of Japanese tourists. Also, some special issues related to the most important target groups have been separately highlighted.

HOW TO SERVE JAPANESE TOURISTS?

ACCOMMODATION SERVICES



This checklist is made to help you to evaluate your opportunities to provide rural

ACCOMMODATION SERVICES

for Japanese tourists. Some general pointers are highlighted first, followed by the special requirements of three target groups with most potential: women between 25 and 50 years old, families and intergenerational groups and group travellers.

The practical level tips presented here are based on the feedback and experiences collected in the CAITO project. The list is not exclusive, yet hopefully gives you some ideas on how to reach these target groups.

**GOOD LUCK WITH YOUR
PRODUCT DEVELOPMENT!**

REMEMBER:

- ✓ Accommodation is a large part of the rural experience for tourists, not just a place to sleep.
- ✓ Japanese tourists appreciate punctuality and politeness! Be sure that the services take place as promised and the service is polite!
- ✓ Pay especial attention to cleanliness.
- ✓ Manage the customers' expectations – make sure to provide detailed information beforehand to them.

Tips for the accommodation service. Try to be as objective and realistic as possible when filling in the checklist!	OK	Needs to be improved	Not possible to provide
Safety is important. There should always be someone who your Japanese customers can contact easily in case of a problem or emergency.			
Be sure that someone will welcome the guests, explain the practicalities clearly (at least in English, preferably in Japanese) and provide help! Pay especial attention to the politeness and friendliness of staff and guides etc.			
Instructions related to the accommodation should be in Japanese (or at least in English) e.g. on using the fireplace, kitchen facilities etc.			
Indoor plumbing and running water are a must! In general, most Japanese prefer to stay in hotels. That gives you an idea of the required quality. While Japanese tourists might expect a cottage type of accommodation in rural areas, a high service level, however, is required.			
Separate beds are preferable (even for married couples).			
Preferably each bedroom should have good and more or less equal quality. When travelling in groups, it is important that all guests in a group get rooms of the same standard. If there are different standards between rooms (e.g. the manner in which rooms are equipped, different view) provide this information on your own webpage as well as for travel agencies.			
Accommodation should be “guest ready” and require minimum effort from your visitors (i.e. related to heating, beds made ready etc.)			
Japanese can have problems adjusting to starlit nights; it is important for rooms to have dark (or blackout) curtains.			
Remember you should ALWAYS provide clear guidance, preferably in person, for a sauna experience.			
Wi-Fi should be available.			
Information on what activities are available, restaurants, shops (including opening hours), local culture is valued in English, preferably also in Japanese. Be sure to include proper and up-to-date information and on how these activities can be accessed.			
Japanese like to plan beforehand! Make sure that you have plenty of information and pictures of your accommodation services available on your webpages in English, preferably also in Japanese.			
Access			
Easy access is the key! Being able to provide transportation from a harbour, main bus station etc. is considered a competitive advantage!			
If providing transportation: it is absolutely unacceptable for the driver to talk on a mobile/cell phone , drivers should be experienced, stay within speed limits and drive carefully.			
Sometimes Japanese tourists expect to be served mineral water on buses, as a welcome gesture.			

In addition, keep the following in mind concerning the different target groups:

Women under 50 years			
This target group is a bit more adventurous than others. They are not likely to rent a car, but can be interested in using public transport. Thus, instructions for public transport should be available, clear and up-to-date.			
Lower levels of accommodation can also be acceptable for this target group, but they must know about it beforehand!			
Families			
Playgrounds, toys or facilities for children are valued as due to long travel it is not possible to bring much luggage. However, remember the safety conscious thinking of this target group!			
Groups			
When travelling in groups, it is important that all guests in a group get rooms of the same standard.			
Senior group travellers need to have easily accessible rooms.			
Bathtubs are preferred instead of showers. If there are only showers available , provide this information on your own webpage as well as for travel agencies.			
Transportation must be included in the package (either by you or the travel agency).			

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HOW TO SERVE JAPANESE TOURISTS?

ACTIVITY PROGRAMMES



This checklist is made to help you to evaluate your opportunities to provide rural

ACTIVITY PROGRAMMES

to Japanese tourists. Some general pointers are highlighted first, followed by the special requirements of three target groups with most potential: women under 50 years old, families and intergenerational groups and group travellers.

The practical level tips presented here are based on the feedback and experiences collected in the CAITO project. The list is not exclusive, yet hopefully gives you some ideas on how to reach these target groups.

GOOD LUCK WITH YOUR PRODUCT DEVELOPMENT!

REMEMBER::

- ✓ Authentic experiences (not just sightseeing) are greatly appreciated. The natural environment, peaceful ways of living, history, low population density are the attractions of our countries. Use them in your products!
- ✓ Japanese tourists appreciate punctuality and politeness! Be sure that the services take place as promised and the service is polite!
- ✓ Pay especial attention to cleanliness.
- ✓ National tourist boards are already promoting certain food or raw materials as part of their image marketing. Make the best use of those in an innovative way!

Tips for organising the activity programmes Try to be as objective and realistic as possible when filling in the checklist!	Is or can be included in my product	Not relevant/ cannot be included in my product
Activities/experiences should be something typical for the country/area. Inspirational stories on activities and experiences are important – should be provided at least in English , but also preferably in Japanese to guarantee the full experience.		
The role of the guide is extremely important in interpreting the experiences and activities. Unlike Baltic and Finnish tourists, Japanese do not want to be just left alone. The guide should at least speak English, preferably Japanese.		
Japanese are very safety conscious. Safety aspects should be included when providing information on activities.		
The activities must be light and easily participated in! Japanese rarely value extreme activities. Provide activities that are not too physically demanding, like light hiking in a forest, bicycle tours, picking berries/mushrooms, etc.		
Activities including some natural elements are often appreciated in connection to rural tourism.		
Tasting local food is an important experience – stories/origin of food should be available (in English and Japanese). Always use locally sourced food, if possible!		
Enjoying forest and lake landscapes is important to this target group. Integrate these elements into your products.		
Sauna as an experience is highly valued! It needs interpretation though as Japanese sauna culture is a bit different.		
Rural tourists and FITs especially do not want tight schedules – they are there to relax.		
Taking part in local activities (where local people also participate) are appreciated. Provide information on where to meet local people and on local activities , such as markets, village festivals, etc. – “what to do” handouts!		
Beautiful natural sceneries valued. Connection to nature might be a way to go with this target group.		
This target group has a special interest towards cultural products . They also appreciate visiting historical sites. However, remember the interpretation and/or guiding!		
Places that locals visit are targets of interest. Not only the “biggest” sights (local cafés, parks, bars etc.).		
When travelling in a group, Japanese expect everyone to receive exactly the same treatment . It is recommended that the entire group is addressed e.g. in guiding, not individuals.		
Shopping		
Shopping/local souvenirs are of interest. However, remember the limitations of export/import rules and restrictions (not too heavy, difficult to transport etc.)! Need to be of high quality.		

Japan is a gift giving culture → need for small souvenirs that can be taken home for friends and family.		
Have information on the shopping opportunities available or include it in your programme. Note that Japanese are accustomed to longer shop opening hours than typically exist in rural areas.		
Access		
Easy access is the key! Make sure that you have instructions for public transport in your webpages, and they are clear and up-to-date. Most Japanese tourists are not likely to rent a car. Being able to provide transportation from a harbour, main bus station etc. is considered a competitive advantage!		
If providing transportation: it is absolutely unacceptable for the driver to talk on a mobile/cell phone , drivers should be experienced, stay within speed limits and drive carefully.		
Sometimes Japanese tourists expect to be served mineral water on buses , as a welcome gesture.		

In addition, keep the following in mind concerning the different target groups:

Women under 50 years		
Cultural lessons are also appreciated , such as handicraft workshops, baking/preparing local food, learning local folk music, etc.		
This target group enjoys “live like locals” type of products. Can you integrate this into what you offer?		
Possibility to “peek” into everyday activities e.g. local supermarkets is interesting for this target group.		
Programmes that combine city holidays and rural breaks could be interesting for this target group.		
Shopping: design products are important and typically known beforehand to the target group. Shopping for these can also be combined into rural holidays .		
Families		
For younger couples guiding in English might be sufficient.		
Young couples though, might like to try something a bit more adventurous.		
If your target group is families, remember to also include activities suited to children’s abilities!		
Families prefer nature, wellbeing, famous children’s characters, such as Moomin, Santa Claus, the aurora borealis. Use these in your products, if possible.		
Young couples like experiences, natural phenomena, special/historic sites, aesthetics. Include these aspects in your products if possible.		
Domestic animals are often interesting for children with families.		
Tasting local food is an important experience – but remember to also provide some familiar foods for children.		
A flexible schedule is preferred by this target group – make sure the schedule for your product is not too busy.		
Images for social media are important, Wi-Fi access preferred .		

Groups		
Group travellers book their holidays through a travel agency. Thus, they are your primary clients. Your products must fit their requirements.		
Cultural <i>lessons are also appreciated</i> , such as handicraft workshops, baking/preparing local food, learning local folk music, etc.		
The activities/experiences should be <i>easily accessed</i> .		
Interest <i>towards cultural products</i> . They also appreciate visiting historical sites. However, remember the interpretation and/or guiding!		
When in a group, they expect <i>everyone to receive exactly the same treatment</i> . It is recommended that the entire group is addressed e.g. in guiding, not individuals.		
Programmes that <i>combine city holidays and rural breaks</i> could be interesting for this target group.		
<i>All the activities/experiences should be properly introduced and described beforehand</i> – what is the idea of the activity, why it is interesting, how long it takes, how one should be equipped etc. Use a lot of pictures!		
Make sure that <i>ALL the information on activities/experiences is provided on your own webpage as well as for travel agencies</i> .		
<i>Transportation to all activities/experiences must be included in the package</i> (either by you or the travel agency).		

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HOW TO SERVE JAPANESE TOURISTS?

CATERING SERVICES



This checklist has been made to help you evaluate your opportunities to provide rural

CATERING SERVICES

to Japanese tourists. Some general pointers are highlighted first, followed by the special requirements of three target groups with most potential: women between 25 and 49 years old, families and intergenerational groups and group travellers.

The practical level tips presented here are based on the feedback and experiences collected in the CAITO project. The list is not exclusive, yet hopefully gives you some ideas on how to reach these target groups.

GOOD LUCK WITH YOUR PRODUCT DEVELOPMENT!

REMEMBER:

- ✓ If the food is bad, it is very difficult to compensate for it with other elements in your programme. However, if the food is excellent, it can help to alleviate potential slips → It is a worthwhile to focus on good quality food!
- ✓ Japanese tourists appreciate punctuality and politeness! Be sure that the services take place as promised and the service is polite!
- ✓ Pay especial attention to cleanliness.
- ✓ National tourist boards are already promoting certain food or raw materials as part of their image marketing. Make the best use of those in an innovative way!
- ✓ Tour operators sometimes organise the catering services for groups. Therefore, they also set requirements for your services. Make sure you meet them.



Tips for the catering service. Try to be as objective and realistic as possible when filling in the checklist!	OK	Needs to be improved	Not possible to provide
The opportunity to eat and taste local food is greatly appreciated! Local cuisine and products are among the most important factors for Japanese in choosing the tourism destination.			
Stories and information on the origin of the food are important to create a successful experience → ALWAYS accompany local food with stories and local culture whenever possible.			
Possibility to have catering services even in the cottages is important. Japanese women do not want to cook on their holidays.			
In restaurants, special attention needs to be given to food quality and quantity, guests' wishes and waiters' manners. E.g. when entering the restaurant each guest should be welcomed with eye contact.			
Good atmosphere (ambiance) is important and includes communication, room design and decoration.			
Indicate the ingredients that are recommended even on the buffet table. Some dishes might be unfamiliar for Japanese.			
Japanese are small eaters. Remember the portion sizes that Japanese are used to are typically smaller than expected by Western tourists.			
Menus in restaurants should be translated into English/Japanese. Japanese also appreciate pictures on the menu.			
Older guests do not eat a lot of meat. Menus need to be made very carefully.			
Japanese prefer a range of vegetables (both fresh and cooked).			
Visual impression of food and its arrangement is very important. Remember this when setting the table.			
Japanese guests prefer to sit inside the restaurant , regardless of the season			
Authenticity of food, seasonal treats and raw materials are valued.			
Opportunities to participate in the cooking or collecting of the raw materials for the dishes as a guided activity might be interesting.			
Access			
Easy access is the key! Make sure that you have instructions for public transport in your webpages, and they are clear and up-to-date. Most Japanese tourists are not likely to rent a car.			
Being able to provide transportation from a harbour, main bus station etc. is considered a competitive advantage!			

In addition, keep the following in mind concerning the different target groups:

FAMILIES			
Our traditional food can sometimes seem very odd to the Japanese. Remember to have also some neutral dishes available , especially for children.			
Make sure you also have facilities for children , like suitable chairs in the restaurant.			
GROUPS			
In Japanese groups, everybody should be served evenly . Note this!			
Our traditional food can sometimes seem very odd to the Japanese. Remember to also have some neutral dishes available .			
Transportation must be included in the package (either by you or the travel agency)			

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HOW TO MARKET TO JAPANESE TOURISTS?

MARKET YOUR RURAL SERVICES



This checklist has been made to help you evaluate your opportunities to

MARKET YOUR RURAL SERVICES

to Japanese tourists. Some general pointers are highlighted first, followed by the special requirements of three target groups with most potential: women between 25 and 50 years old, families and intergenerational groups and group travellers.

The practical level tips presented here are based on the feedback and experiences collected in the CAITO project. The list is not exclusive, yet hopefully gives you some ideas on how to reach these target groups.

GOOD LUCK WITH YOUR PRODUCT DEVELOPMENT!

REMEMBER:

- ✓ National tourist boards are already promoting certain food or raw materials as part of their image marketing. Make the best use of these in an innovative way!
- ✓ Make sure the style of your webpages or advertising matches the Japanese criteria.
- ✓ Join forces whenever possible! Marketing is an expensive business.
- ✓ Group travellers book their holidays through a travel agency. Thus, they are your primary clients. Your products must fit their requirements.
- ✓ Group travellers want a lot of information beforehand. In order to avoid disappointments, the travel experience should be well organised and the information on the service should be explicit and detailed!



Tips for marketing your services Try to be as objective and realistic as possible when filling in this checklist!	OK	Needs to be improved	Not possible in my company
Online marketing can be effective for this target group , but remember to choose the right channels according to Japanese standards!			
Make sure you are visible in social media , but remember you have to add new posts regularly.			
Remember the target group! The images should be cute and soft according to Japanese taste.			
The information should be available at least in English , but also preferably in Japanese .			
Do not underestimate the importance of travel magazines, guidebooks and trend setters or other influencers . Use these if possible!			
Japanese prefer to plan their trip ahead. Detailed descriptions of the destination, accommodation and activities are a must!			
Japanese are very safety conscious - emphasise safety in your marketing messages.			
Use some kind of visible sign of the destination's trustworthiness ; e.g. national travel association logo, if possible. Investigate whether you can connect your product to some known brand or travel magazine.			
Combining city and rural destinations could be attractive as a marketing message (combine familiar & new products) → trustworthiness with a familiar brand. Rural tourism products rarely have a large enough reputation alone , do you need to connect with other brands or a country brand?			
Emphasise similarities between Japanese and Finnish & Baltic people , create a safe and familiar image.			
Finland and the Baltics are relatively novel destinations in the Japanese market, highlight this! Japanese are eager to discover new countries and destinations.			
Explain what is meant by rural tourism , do not just use the word since it may have a different connotation in Japanese than you mean.			
Market clean and unspoiled nature & natural phenomena .			
Easy access is the key! Make sure that you have instructions for public transport in your webpages, and that they are clear and up-to-date. Most Japanese tourists are not likely to rent a car. Being able to provide transportation is considered a competitive advantage!			
Possibility to buy			
This target group can be reached through internet shops, however, easiness is valued, Japanese prefer to buy and pay before the trip – this target group can also sometimes buy products on the spot, but still prefer to be prepared before starting their holiday.			

Use either direct reservation systems or co-operation with the travel agencies who have one . E-mail or especially bookings by phone are not preferred.			
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In addition, keep the following in mind concerning the different target groups:

Women under 50 years and Families			
Flexible packaging can be seen as a competitive advantage → co-operation with cities / city hotels?			
Groups			
As group travellers book their holidays through travel agencies – provide detailed information (the quality of accommodation, the activities provided, catering) of your service to travel agencies. This is also your “insurance” in case of potential problems.			
In addition, to travel agencies, detailed descriptions of the destination, accommodation and activities are a must on your own webpages			
Include plenty of images of your service on your own webpage.			
Group travellers utilise guidebooks to get information on destinations – examine whether this could be used to disseminate information on your business.			
Senior group travellers book their holidays beforehand in Japan, the role of physical travel agency is still vital! → make agreements with Japanese travel agencies .			
Use either direct reservation systems or co-operation with the travel agencies who have one . E-mail or especially bookings by phone are not preferred.			

**MORE INFORMATION ON THE JAPANESE MARKET
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Annex 2. Useful forms for digital marketing planning

Form for digital marketing plan

Core message	
Baseline	
Resources	
Customers	
Objectives	
Operations	
Monitoring	

Model of channel strategy

Channel	Target group	Product - Goals	Message - Content
Web pages	Everyone who is interested	All products - Read Fall for Buy	Always up-to-date information All the relevant information Ordering and contact information
Blog	Professionals	Indicates to reader: Workmanship, Networking, collaboration	Interesting and current affairs
Facebook - person	Friends	No	Private person, no public material
Facebook - company	Potential and existing customers	All products- Customer finds, interests and moves to webpage to purchase	Campaigns, up-to-date, announcements, company, products, publicity for authors
Instagram	Potential and existing customers	A picture tells more than thousands words - The customer is interested and moves to webpage to purchase	Attractive pictures of products, content produced by customers, publicity for authors and company

Form for channel strategy

Channel	Target group	Product - Goals	Message - Content

